CONSERVATION Showcase

Mimbres River Farmers Benefit from Natural Combination

Courtesy of Mike Matush, New Mexico Environment Department

Farmers in the Mimbres River area are benefitting from a revetment fence that slows floodwater, thanks to the initiative and desire of staff from the New Mexico Environment Department and NRCS Silver City field office to make cooperative conservation happen.

Enabling NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program and EPA(h) program to work cooperatively seems a natural combination for producers that had problems with lands adjacent to rivers and perennial streams that were listed by the EPA as having impairments due to long-term problems with the natural resource.

The Mimbres River has been periodically monitored by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) for the EPA's Clean Water Act, enacted by the federal government in the early 70s to restore and maintain the chemical, biological, and physical integrity of the nation's waters. Monitoring found the Mimbres River having a temperature problem mostly due to channel widening, creating a shallow flow that heats up quickly in full sunlight. This also presents a problem for producers that keep losing their most productive river bottom lands from periodic flooding.

After a devastating flood in February 2005, it was obvious that some landowners could not stand another such event without suffering an irrecoverable loss in production and possibly having to reassess their role in agriculture.

A proposal was conceived by NMED personnel and the Silver City NRCS Field Office to leverage funding sources that could assist with the stabilization of the Mimbres River channel. The proposal, Mimbres River Revetment Fence, was submitted to the NMED Surface Water Quality Bureau, who administers the 319(h) program, while the individual landowners submitted their

EQIP contract to build an NRCS 580F Streambank and Shoreline Protection Wire Revetment Fence.

The purpose of the fence is to maintain and rebuild loss streambanks by slowing floodwaters down while depositing fine sediments behind the fence. These sediments will then be replanted with vegetation that promotes more sediment retention, thus bringing those lands back to some use and improve wildlife habitat, while protecting valuable farm land.

The revetment fence has been a proven practice on the Mimbres and Gila River for producers in the past. It also provides a mechanism that prevents further channel widening, making this NRCS design a useful tool for the 319(h) program.

The Mimbres project is an outstanding example of collaborative funding proposals that are sure to benefit both agriculture and water quality.

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NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service